

A NATURE WALK IN SUSSEX.

At the end of April I made the acquaintance of a delightful spot on the borders of Sussex, within walking distance of the historic Penshurst Place, and rejoicing in the curious name of Hottye.

It is situated on a fine, open common, surrounded by woodlands carpeted with flowers, in which there is a wealth of bird and animal life—an ideal spot in which to study wild Nature's ways, nor were we slow to avail ourselves of the opportunity.

I was surprised to find wood anemones growing on the open common, as I have never known them quit the shelter of the woods before. Their leaves were turned to a rich red-brown through this unwonted exposure. In some fields beyond the quaint little inn which offered us hospitality, cowslips bloomed in profusion, while in the woods just beyond there was a wealth of primroses, and here on the edge of the woods, between cowslips and primroses, we found oxlips—a living testimony to Nature's wondrous arrangements for cross-fertilization. In one little wood a profusion of hand-spotted orchis and tway-blade was springing up on all sides; and one green lane through which we passed shimmered with a silvery haze of "Lady's smock," and "Lords and Ladies" were beginning to peep out of the hedgerows.

A sheltered corner of the common was ablaze with yellow gorse, over which the bees were very busy. The buds were bursting into leaf on every side, but most conspicuously "the oak before the ash."

"So the summer will splash," says the old adage, which has proved a true prophecy so far.

There was the white snow of wild cherry blossom, and in the hollow by the sluggish little river, a golden glory of marsh marigolds spread over the fields.

The bird life was even more exuberant. We saw a young thrush which had but just left its nest. In the little inn garden a thrush and a blackbird were building busily, and on the common outside a pheasant and a partridge amicably

shared a nest, and I am told that this is not at all an uncommon thing. Old hens will often sit three deep on a nest if permitted to do so.

We saw a tiny whitethroat with a downy feather in his beak, on the way to line his dainty nest. We stood stock still to watch him. But, alas, some slight movement disclosed our presence to him, and after a moment's hesitation he dropped his precious burden, evidently considering discretion the better part of valour.

On a yew tree sat a golden-crested wren, whose tiny throat throbbed with the rapture of his song. There were numbers of perky little cole-tits hanging to the tree branches, and picking industriously at the buds. We saw blue-tits and chaffinches and robins galore; while in the distance flashed by the bright plumage of a jay. We heard that herald of spring, the cuckoo, and the harsh note of the reed-warbler, and the yellow hammer asking for his "little bit of bread and no cheese." Also the peculiar rattling trill of the nut-hatch, or Jack Baker as he is called in these parts. Indeed, the air was full of a perpetual drip, drip, of bird notes, through which the choicer singers, blackbirds, thrushes, and larks wove and interwove their bold, clear arabesques of song. We saw plovers and doves, and once we caught a glimpse of the great green woodpecker; and last, but not least, we saw several specimens of an unknown bird to us, which I believe to be the "black-headed reedbunting." One was perched on some reeds near the water—a handsome little chap with a jet black head, brown back, white collar and chest, and a little black cravat. His mate was quite a sombre-tinted little brown bird. These birds appear to be fairly common in the vicinity of water. They build in tufts of grass among the reeds, and if an intruder comes near the nest, the male bird will act as a decoy, pretending to be injured.

E. M. H.